

COVID-19

Oldham Council

Test, Track and Trace

The introduction and roll out of local test, track and trace arrangements

Context

Covid-19 has seen an exacerbation of existing inequalities in the town linked to unemployment, poverty and health. Local increased restrictions were placed on the Borough on 28 July in response to rising infection rates which peaked at 110 per 100,000 population. Emerging evidence suggested that approximately one third of Covid cases were arising from transmission within and between households. Urgent action was needed to bring the rates of infection down and in doing so, avoid full lockdown. Services were already stretched in relation to dealing with Covid-19, but policies, procedures and decision-making processes were in place which formed a sound basis for implementing more targeted testing, tracking and tracing. To do this the Council used data and intelligence to identify and map Covid-19 hotspots which was updated on a daily basis. Staff have, where possible, been redeployed and volunteers recruited to help with the doorstep engagement of residents. There has been close working between the Local Authority Senior Management Team, the Director of Public Health and VFCSE sector to maximise and align resources.

Development

The aim was to target hotspots of increasing rates of infection, mapped by public health and LA colleagues. The Strategic Co-ordination and Recovery Group, Tactical Co-ordinating Group and five sub-groups were established to manage and have oversight of the test, track and trace approach. Key stakeholders were actively engaged in developing and implementing the approach through their engagement in these groups – so that their existing resources, skills and expertise were effectively harnessed and aligned. For example, colleagues from Public Health, the NHS and CCG were engaged in the Testing sub-group. Community and voluntary sector representatives on the Community engagement sub-group, representatives from the Council and CCG were involved in the epidemiology and intelligence sub-group. Representatives from the Council and Greater Manchester Police were engaged in the Compliance and Enforcement sub-group.

Implementation

Five sub-groups were established to take forward key areas of work:

- Testing
- Tracing
- Compliance and Enforcement
- Epidemiology and Data
- Communications and Engagement

Testing capacity has been increased significantly by the:

- establishment of local testing sites close to communities where rates are highest
- introduction of three mobile testing units to tackle outbreaks
- commissioning of a local testing service to test staff, support care homes and respond to smaller outbreaks
- introduction of a doorstep engagement and testing offer
- locally supported contact tracing for all cases not followed up by NHS Test and Trace within 48 hours
- GPs contacting positive cases in their practice population to provide advice and support
- introduction of 'micro grants' to provide financial support to people who need to isolate but are not entitled to sick pay.

Community Engagement was undertaken by the formation of Oldham's Equality Advisory Group and regular engagement with Oldham's Mosque Council and Interfaith Forum, Roma community, the voluntary sector, local youth services and businesses.

Review

The Covid-19 Prevention & Control Board is meeting twice weekly to oversee Oldham's response. At the introduction of increased restrictions, the Covid-19 infection rate was approaching over 100 cases per 100,000 population; this fell dramatically over the three weeks to 58 cases per 100,000. Evidence shows that the transmission of infections between and within households fell to 22%. Its approach relied upon co-ordinated action and alignment of resources from across Team Oldham and redeployment of Council staff; for example, in the co-ordination of volunteers from across the Council, NHS, housing providers; members of the public; Elected Members; and partners in the VFCSE sector. From this activity, the Council has learned:

- interventions need to be evidence-based
- clear communication is essential
- harnessing local knowledge and skills is vital; making use of existing community contacts and community and inter-faith networks is essential in building trust and participation within local communities

- residents generally respond well to a more interactive, informed and personal approach

The Council will continue to respond to Covid and the issues it raises – based on local data and intelligence through the operation of these established groups. It is also working to ensure that its Covid-19 response is captured and used to inform broader work to tackle poverty and inequality in the borough, through the development of a cross partnership Poverty Steering Group. This will be essential in both understanding and responding to the disproportionate impacts of the virus on disadvantaged communities and people already experiencing poverty in the Borough

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